

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method comprising:
  - performing a head polarity detection routine comprising the steps of:
    - setting a read gate period duration to a first value;
    - searching for a good address mark signal during a first read gate period with a channel polarity set to a first polarity; and
    - identifying a polarity of a data head based upon the channel polarity when the good address mark is detected.
2. The method of claim 1, and if the good address mark is not found during the first read gate period, then prior to the identifying step the head polarity detection routine further comprising:
  - toggling the polarity of the channel to a second polarity; and
  - searching for the good address mark during a second read gate period with the channel polarity set to the second polarity.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein the head polarity detection routine further comprises repeating the steps of searching for the good address mark during subsequent read gate periods until the good address mark is found, the polarity of the channel being toggled between the first and second polarities after the completion of each read gate period in which the good address mark is not found.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein setting the read gate period duration to the first value further comprises setting a servo gate period duration to a time corresponding to a predetermined number of servo sectors.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the steps of searching for the good address mark signal further comprise:
  - determining whether an address mark has been detected;
  - de-asserting the read gate if it is determined that an address mark has been detected; and
  - determining whether the detected address mark qualifies as the good address mark.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein if it is determined that the detected address mark qualifies as the good address mark, the head polarity detection routine further comprising setting the servo gate period duration to a time corresponding to one servo sector.
7. The method of claim 3, and further comprising:
  - performing the head polarity detection routine for each of a plurality of data heads to determine a polarity for each data head; and
  - storing the polarity for each of the plurality of data heads.
8. The method of claim 7, and further comprising:
  - determining if a predetermined number of consecutive errors have occurred;
  - and
  - if the predetermined number of consecutive errors have occurred, then performing the head polarity detection routine to determine whether a head polarity flip has occurred.

9. The method of claim 8, and further comprising updating the stored polarity for any head which is determined to have had a head polarity flip.
10. An apparatus comprising:
  - a data head;
  - a channel coupled to the data head; and
  - circuitry coupled to the channel and configured to perform a head polarity detection routine comprising the steps:
    - setting a read gate period duration to a first value;
    - searching for a good address mark signal using the data head during a first read gate period with a channel polarity set to a first polarity; and
    - identifying a polarity of the data head based upon the channel polarity when the good address mark is detected.
11. The apparatus of claim 10, and if the good address mark is not found during the first read gate period, then prior to the identifying step the head polarity detection routine further comprising:
  - toggling the polarity of the channel to a second polarity; and
  - searching for the good address mark during a second read gate period with the channel polarity set to the second polarity.

12. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the head polarity detection routine further comprises repeating the steps of searching for the good address mark during subsequent read gate periods until the good address mark is found, the polarity of the channel being toggled between the first and second polarities after the completion of each read gate period in which the good address mark is not found.
13. The apparatus of claim 12, wherein setting the read gate period duration to the first value further comprises setting a servo gate period duration to a time corresponding to a predetermined number of servo sectors.
14. The apparatus of claim 13, wherein the head polarity detection routine steps of searching for the good address mark signal further comprise:
  - determining whether an address mark has been detected;
  - de-asserting the read gate if it is determined that an address mark has been detected; and
  - determining whether the detected address mark qualifies as the good address mark.
15. The apparatus of claim 14, wherein if it is determined that the detected address mark qualifies as the good address mark, the head polarity detection routine further comprising setting the servo gate period duration to a time corresponding to one servo sector.

16. The apparatus of claim 12, and further comprising a plurality of data heads, wherein the circuitry is further configured to perform a method comprising:
  - performing the head polarity detection routine for each of the plurality of data heads to determine a polarity for each data head; and
  - storing the polarity for each of the plurality of data heads.
17. The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the method further comprises:
  - determining if a predetermined number of consecutive errors have occurred;
  - and
  - if the predetermined number of consecutive errors have occurred, then performing the head polarity detection routine to determine whether a head polarity flip has occurred.
18. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein the method further comprises updating the stored polarity for any head which is determined to have had a head polarity flip.